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Great Food / Reviews

# Innovative Indian

*Saffron goes beyond the usual Northern Indian favourites to offer some unconventional concoctions. GEOFFREY EU discovers foie gras, duck, and venison may also make it to the menu*

*Business Times Executive Lifestyle, 7 February 2003*

**Ratings:** 



PAN-FRIED foie gras is not normally a featured menu item when it comes to Indian cuisine, but the owners of a new eatery in Circular Road are determined to make a culinary splash in what is a crowded, competitive category.

For starters, Saffron - which bills itself as a 'bistro' - offers an extensive range of Northern

Indian favourites, but it also plans to include some unconventional concoctions that most Indian foodniks will not be familiar with.

The dishes are designed to both create interest among diners and reflect the effort to give a contemporary twist to a traditional cuisine. While the foie gras - cooked with nutmeg, cumin and cinnamon and served in bite-size portions with apple or mango chutney - has yet to make an appearance on the menu, the preliminary indications are good, according to owner Geri Ng, who developed the menu with sister Marilyn and three chefs recruited from India.

One item that has already passed muster is the curried lamb ribs, marinated and stewed in a variety of spices. The entrepreneurial pair of siblings are also experimenting with duck, venison and other meats that do not normally see the inside of a menu of Indian food. 'Everything is still cooked authentically,' says Ms Ng. 'People want to see more variety - they can't eat butter chicken or tandoori all the time.' She adds: 'What we wanted from the chefs is a more modern, innovative menu.'

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They also wanted to attract a younger, more adventurous clientele and to present the food in a comfortable, more neutral, less intimidating environment.

Interior-wise, Saffron gives only the merest hint of what's on offer on the menu. There's no mistaking the quality of the cuisine, though. A meal of tandoori chicken (\$10 for a half portion), garlic tiger prawns (\$15.90), rogan josh (\$12.50) was uniformly good, as were the assorted vegetable dishes that accompanied them.

Meanwhile, the lamb ribs (\$20) were tasty, tender and nicely complemented by a spicy, rich but not too overpowering sauce, which went down rather well with chunks of garlic naan.

Apart from the main menu, saffron also offers monthly specials that promote dishes from different regions of India. There's also an interesting tapas-style menu of Northern Indian snack food and a sandwich-like tandoori chicken wrap (\$9.90) to cater to lighter appetites.

A generation ago, pioneering restaurants like Omar Khayam and Rang Mahal introduced Singaporeans to the wonders of refined Northern Indian food, helping to cultivate local taste-buds by being on the forefront of the ethnic cuisine explosion.

Saffron, and its young owners, have captured the essence of traditional Indian cooking and given it a modern twist. Their goal, according to Ms Ng, was 'to create an Indian restaurant that people our age will go to'.

It's early days yet, but the casual, no-nonsense, high-quality approach to food bodes well for the restaurant's future. Who knows - that foie gras dish might turn out to be a winner yet.

**DRESS CODE:** Smart Casual

### **Saffron**

50 Circular Road Singapore 049405

Tel: 6536-5025

Open 11am to 11pm, Monday to Saturday.

Set lunches from \$9.90 to \$17.90



**Contemporary twist:** Saffron wants to attract a younger, more adventurous clientele.

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